

THE WELLNESS ISSUE

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designer

A minimalist bathroom scene featuring a white ceramic sink mounted on a black metal stand with two shelves. Above the sink is a large, oval-shaped mirror with a black frame. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

BUILDINGS FOR LIFE

The wellness principles helping to create spaces for healthy living

CREATIVE GETAWAYS

Modern hotel interiors to energise and inspire

THE DESIGNER LIST

Revealing this year's pick of ones-to-watch

INSPIRING
PROJECT
CREATIVITY



DESIGNER: What materials do you most enjoy working with and why?

CHARLIE SMALLBONE: Traditionally, metal has served as a practical rather than decorative choice in the kitchen, largely reserved for appliances and handles. More recently, however, metals have come to the forefront of kitchen design and I see this continuing for some time yet.

Having worked with metal, and also with liquid metal finishes for a number of years now, the idea of broadening the application of metal really attracts me – of taking it beyond its traditional uses. But this needs to be executed carefully and properly. The trend, for me, is metals in the kitchen that look good, have a reason to be there, and will last.

For this reason, I decided to take a disciplined approach with The Metallics Collection, to focus on ‘metal with integrity’. That’s why I decided against liquid metal finishes, and opted to explore the potential for a whole new take on real metals – copper, pewter, zinc, bronze and stainless steel. I found that using real metal brings a unique quality to a kitchen and I can go way beyond a simple stainless-steel sheet, for instance.

DESIGNER: What’s the best part of your job?

SMALLBONE: For me, it’s about the enjoyment that one gets from working with talented people, bringing something to life and creating something that inevitably is more complex as a result of working together. Sometimes, working like this can take you in a direction that you didn’t necessarily think you were going to go. It’s a matter of being broadminded and open enough about the whole process to be able to accept it and enjoy it whilst you do it, because you may well end up with something that is better than you originally imagined it would be.

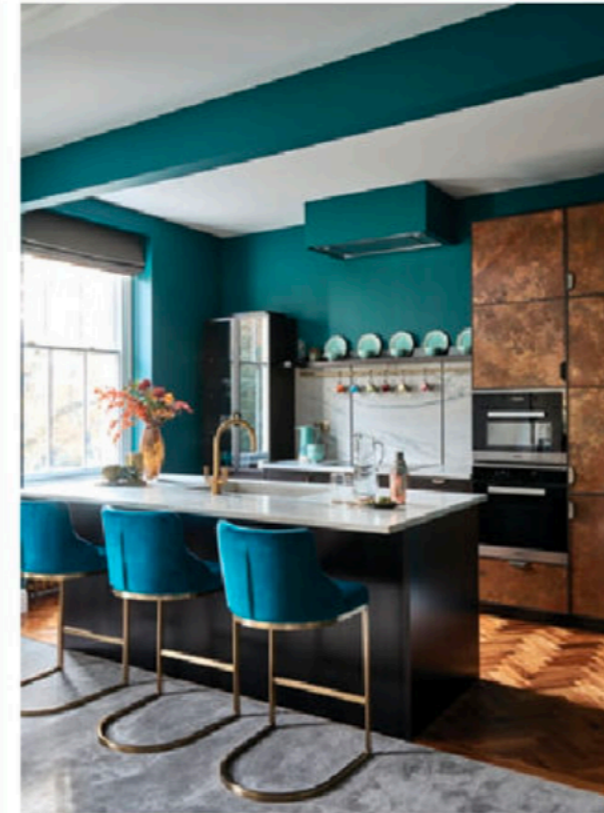
DESIGNER: Which design trends are you most excited by right now?

SMALLBONE: Finishes for metals are a strong focus for 2020. For the Metallics Collection I have taken metals in two different directions – living finishes and sealed finishes. Applying these finishes to prominent areas of the kitchen – such as on integrated fridge-freezers, cupboard doors or on the outside of an island – will create a stunning effect. Whether it’s a living finish that changes over time or a finish that has been beautifully worked on by one of our artisans and sealed in its new state, metal brings a new dimension to the kitchen design.

As an aside, when applying finishes it’s really important to respect the functional nature of the kitchen you’re designing. For this reason, I decided early on to avoid using either living or sealed metallic finishes in intensive work areas that involve heat or water. For example, in our showroom I specified a durable glass splashback for behind the hob. Just as beautiful as metal but more suitable, it was created using an effect called Verre Eglomise, whereby pure silver leaf is applied to the reverse of toughened glass and antiqued.

Something else I see for 2020 is the way we’re looking to the past and reinterpreting it to create the future. This is by no means new, but the way we’re accessing that past has changed. Social media is this amazing research tool that gives us instant access to visual source materials from 50, 60, 70 years ago. This is then inspiring people to revisit those styles and put their own stamp on them.

A good example of this is our work at Ledbury Studio revisiting our original hand-painted kitchen of 30 years ago, but pushing it forward with new paint finishes and wood tints that work with the doors in our Metallics Collection. To me it seems fitting for a bespoke kitchen to have a bespoke paint finish, applied on site.



Test of Metal



We asked industry design stalwart and Founder of Ledbury Studio, **Charlie Smallbone**, to share his thoughts on some of the materials and inspirations that help to shape his work...

A factory-painted kitchen never has the soul of a really good hand-painted finish. On-site painting allows painter and client to work together, tweaking colours and finishes as required, and creating a true personal statement for the client. Having the luxury to explore the past and to then adapt and evolve these wonderful techniques is a great pleasure.

Another example of looking to the past to help create the future is the Housekeeper's Cupboard from our Ledbury Shaker collection. This is a classic piece which we have given a Ledbury Studio twist with an elegant and significant Deco-style cornice, accentuated proportions between the base and top cupboards, and our handmade brass pull handles. Freestanding pieces like this have long been popular in modern kitchens and will continue to be so.

The Housekeeper's Cupboard is a fantastically versatile piece of furniture – a great place to store your toaster and coffee machine and to house your microwave; it keeps all sorts of important kitchen items in a beautiful and accessible place. However, perhaps the greatest benefit is that everything you need is close to hand; the Cupboard features stacks of storage: shelves, door racks, cupboards and drawers. The one in the showroom was painted on-site by our artist Emma Culshaw-



Bell, who developed the original layered paint finish and created the precise colours from pigment. Each Housekeeper's Cupboard we build is personalised for our client.

What has changed dramatically in the kitchen – and will continue to do so – is the amount of technology we now have at our fingertips. Many of our projects now incorporate smart systems for controlling lighting, heating, entertainment and more. These systems unify all the different and disparate technologies that co-exist in the home, but require technically precise design in their incorporation into the modern kitchen and home. As the kitchen becomes an increasingly versatile and exciting place, so our designs evolve to accommodate all these new elements.

Irrespective of trends, when it comes to kitchen design, people still set out with the same objectives: their kitchen needs to work for them – it must look great, and be the place they want to live in.

DESIGNER: What have you been inspired by recently?

SMALLBONE: I recently revisited the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, which has fantastic collections of art and archaeology going right through the ages. I find the incredible items of jewellery, metalwork, and pottery originating

across the ages really inspiring – the skill of the artisans and the techniques developed all these years ago are just amazing.

DESIGNER: What is the biggest challenge facing designers today?

SMALLBONE: The perennial challenge of keeping things fresh. To keep designing things that are interesting, that work and are relevant.

DESIGNER: If you could change one thing about the industry, what would it be?

SMALLBONE: I would like to see more genuine product innovation at a mass-entry level giving the consumer a greater breadth of choice. The industry seems to be both prescriptive and restrictive of choice possibilities for material selection. There's a practical reason for this, which is that people want to make money. So, they're all producing stuff that they know they can sell. But the inevitability of this is that it runs contra to the idea of originality and design, because all you see is repeat, repeat, repeat.

I don't know what the answer is, but I wish there was a way to get more individuality and more originality into the products that designers are able to use for their clients. That's definitely one thing I'd like to change about the industry if I could.



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